

OAK WOODLAND & ELEPHANT TREE WOODLAND VEGETATION COMMUNITIES



Woodland occurs in a variety of locations where soil conditions are moister than the soils hosting Coastal Sage Scrub and Chaparral vegetation. In the lowlands, they are mostly confined to stream and canyon bottoms, but in the foothills and mountains they occur in areas with good soil, especially on north and east facing slopes. Woodlands have an open canopy, whereas in forests the trees are dense enough to form a closed canopy. Woodlands within the County are mostly comprised of a few species. The Coast live oak, with cup shaped leaves, grows on the coast and in the foothills. The Engelmann oak with bluish leaves grows in the foothills. Both the California black oak with its deciduous lobed leaves, and the Canyon live oak with shiny dark green leaves and big-capped acorns grow in the mountains. Oak woodlands often have an understory of Poison oak, Gooseberries and various herbs.. Approximately 125,000 acres of Oak Woodlands remain in San Diego County. There has been some loss of Oak woodland habitat as a result of firewood harvesting. The woodlands most at risk occur in coastal stream courses.

When Woodland is preserved, it helps to protect numerous species. Woodlands serve as habitat for bird species including the: Plain titmouse, Mountain chickadee, Nuttall's woodpecker, Northern flicker, Scrub jay, and a variety of Flycatchers and Owls.

Since Oak Woodlands often occur as linear features, the mammals that inhabit them are often the same ones that occur in the surrounding chaparral including coyote, bobcat and the occasional Mountain lion (Cougar). In addition, raccoons, Striped and Spotted skunks and opossums make their homes within this plant community. Shrews and Long-tailed weasels tend to prefer Oak Woodland areas that provide more moisture. Several species of bats feel quite at home, upside-down, in Oak Woodland vegetation.

The Elephant Tree Woodland occurs in the desert areas in San Diego County. This is a small tropical tree that occurs widely in Baja California and reaches its northern limit in Southern California and Central Arizona. The Elephant Tree is in the Frankincense family and its leaves give off a strong odor when crushed, like the Pepper Tree.



Courtesy of the County of San Diego
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